

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
BROADBAND AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

October 3, 2022

Kandiyohi County Health & Human Services Building, Willmar and Via ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Mark Boeschen, Dean Bouta (via Zoom), Jason Hulstein, Roger Imdieke, Tony Kirby (via Zoom), Larry Kleindl, Michelle Marotzke, Ryan Nelson (via Zoom), Rollie Nissen, David Sisser and Brian Zawierucha (via Zoom)

Excused: Donna Boonstra and Bruce DeBlieck

Absent: Goldie Smith

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

Secretarial: Cathy Skindeliem, Legal and Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Chairperson Mark Boeschen called the meeting to order at approximately 10:02 a.m.

AGENDA—Chair Boeschen added under New Business a report from David Sisser regarding the City of Willmar’s Request for Proposal (RFP) for city-wide high-speed internet.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Nissen, SECONDED BY Michelle Marotzke, to approve the Minutes of the September 12, 2022 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED

NEW BUSINESS—

City of Willmar RFP. David Sisser reported his participation in the City of Willmar’s RFP Broadband Review Committee, which is planning to bring fiber to the premise throughout the city. An RFP was distributed to internet providers and responses were received from Vibrant Broadband, Windstream and Hometown Fiber. The committee reviewed the responses and will present their recommendations to the Willmar City Council within two weeks. Willmar currently has three providers: CenturyLink, Charter and Windstream. While Willmar has a substantial amount of fiber already in place, the new proposal will cover the final connection to homes and businesses.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

West Project—Chair Boeschen reported that Federated Telephone Cooperative received no challenges to its Border-to-Border Grant application as of September 12, 2022. The State of Minnesota has not yet released its list of challenges publicly. The announcement of grant awards is scheduled to happen before the end of fall. Another round of grants is planned immediately following the current round.

Vibrant Broadband. Chair Boeschen reported installation on the north side of Long Lake is underway. Vibrant Broadband did not receive the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) ReConnect 3 Grant and will apply for the ReConnect 4 Grant. This proposal will be significantly smaller due to rule changes by the USDA on the definition of “rural.” A meeting will be held in the beginning of November to discuss which areas will be covered. No action is necessary from this committee. Vibrant Broadband sent out postcards requesting speed tests and publicized the project on social media, with review assistance from EDC staff.

Charter. Chair Boeschen reported that Charter has not found a permanent replacement for Amanda Duerr, making it difficult to make progress, but he will continue to encourage new projects.

Arvig. Prinsburg has experienced a two-week delay in Arvig’s broadband project and completion is now expected by the end of October. Chair Boeschen signed a support letter for a Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program grant, which will diversify the fiber redundancy between Prinsburg and Willmar.

Kandiyohi County Line Extension Grant. Chair Boeschen reported Charter and Vibrant Broadband are willing to work with Kandiyohi County on the Line Extension Grant. Workflow will be established, including the logistics of who applies where. When ready, it will be presented to this committee for approval. Each provider will register to ensure contact information is available.

Mediacom Lakes Project. Chair Boeschen reported the Mediacom Lake Project has been cancelled due to TDS applying for permits in the same area. A meeting is planned with TDS on October 4, 2022 to determine its plans for the area.

Discussion was held regarding the promotion of area broadband projects. Roger Imdieke suggested testimonials, noting that he spoke with a township clerk who described her internet connection from the Vibrant Broadband project as “lightning fast.” A press release will be drafted. Completion celebrations for the Long Lake and Prinsburg projects will also be organized. As projects are completed, Kandiyohi County could send out notifications encouraging residents to hook up since these projects were financed with county dollars, and these letters would include the testimonials.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds. Chair Boeschen reported \$3.7 million of the \$6.3 million in ARPA funds have been designated for use. The target cost per location remains at \$1,500, but could increase in more sparsely populated areas in the southern part of the county. The City of Willmar has been excluded from projects because it is considered to be served already. The County Board has the option to use the unallocated funds for other endeavors if broadband projects cannot be secured.

REPORTS—

Rural Broadband Coalition. Swedburg took part in a “Where We Go from Here” webinar held by the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition and will provide an update to committee members in a follow-up email.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular committee meeting is **10:00 a.m., Monday, November 7, 2022** at Room 2057, Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.